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ABSTRACT

A study examined the relationship between the number of scholastic publications organizations to which school newspapers belong and the newspapers' ratings in a national contest/critique. It was hypothesized that membership would not have significant impact on ratings. A sample of 189 newspapers was drawn from membership records of the Columbia Scholastic Press Association, one of three national organizations (National Scholastic Press Association and Quill and Scroll are the other two). Eighty-nine advisers from this sample completed and returned a mail questionnaire requesting information demographics and organization membership. Ratings for each of the newspapers were averaged and designated as good, better or best. Most of the respondents were public schools, with evenly distributed enrollment, ranging from less than 500 to more than 2,500. Most papers indicated belonging to two publications organizations. The number of organization memberships did not appear to have any relationship to enrollment. Cross-tabulations of newspapers' memberships by newspaper ranking showed an unmistakable pattern. As membership in scholastic publications organizations increased, so did the percentage of newspapers in the highest ranking categories. Results indicated a significant difference among rankings of newspapers according to the number of scholastic publications organizations to which the newspaper belonged. (Five tables of data and a bibliography are included.) (HTH)

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A Study of High School Newspapers' Ratings in a National
Contest/Critique with Regard to Membership in
Publications Organizations

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A Study of High School Newspapers' Ratings in a National Contest/
Critique with Regard to Membership in Publications Organizations

Introduction

Participation in organizations for high school publications is popular with a number of staffs and advisers. Such organizations exist at the national level, at the state level, in regions encompassing several states, and in regions encompassing parts of a single state. In 1981, it was reported that 122 scholastic press associations of one kind or another existed in the United States (Hines, 1981).

Conventional wisdom would have it that membership in such organizations is beneficial. Most of them provide services such as critiques of publications, regular conferences or conventions, and newsletters or magazines for their readers.

Each of those services could be helpful. Critiques could help a newspaper's adviser and staff to improve their publication by pointing out strengths (which could be maintained) and weaknesses (which could be improved upon). Conventions or conferences could help by providing an adviser and staff with a chance to hear experts talk about topics such as layout, writing, and photography as well as by providing for profitable discussions with other advisers and staffs. Newsletters or magazines could help by keeping advisers and staffs informed of current trends and by presenting tips on improving publications.

If all of the statements above are true, then belonging to a

scholastic publications organization should certainly be beneficial for those associated with a particular publication. Thus, a newspaper that is a member of that type of organization might reasonably be expected to be better than one that belongs to no such organization.

Carrying that logic one step further would indicate that membership in more than one scholastic publications organization should be even more beneficial than belonging to only a single one. Multiple memberships would give the publication's adviser and staff more opportunities for improvement of their paper. Thus, newspapers that are members of more than one organization should be better than those belonging to only one.

This paper presents the results of a study of that idea. The study was undertaken with the newspaper as the unit being analyzed and the newspaper's rating in a national evaluation as the measure of the quality of the newspaper.

The research question considered here is, "How does the number of scholastic publications organizations to which newspapers belong relate to the newspapers' ratings in a national contest/critique?" The hypothesis is, "There will be no significant ($p < .05$) difference among ratings of high school newspapers in a national contest/critique when the number of scholastic publications organizations to which the newspapers belong is considered."

The procedures and the outcome of the study follow.

Review of the Literature

Material related to high school newspapers has appeared in dissertations, theses, journal articles and other sources. Some highlights of the available literature are presented below.

Probably more people have studied the backgrounds of advisers than have studied any other single aspect related to high school newspapers, and most of their findings have left little to encourage supporters of scholastic journalism.

Bellman (1961) wrote, "A major finding of this North Dakota Survey is that teachers and advisers lack the necessary training to adequately carry out journalistic tasks" (p. 68). Other studies scattered through the 1960s and 1970s in other states indicated similar situations. However, Brooks (1978) and Weatherholt (1983) found journalism teachers and advisers in Indiana and West Virginia, respectively, to be better prepared than their counterparts in earlier studies.

Journalism classes for high school students have been the subject of some components of the literature. Shea (1981) stressed the need for such classes. However, studies have shown that relatively few schools offered such classes in the 1960s. Figures ranged from 44 percent in Indiana (Boyd, 1960) to 5 percent of small high schools in Southern Illinois (Hauth, 1966). However, more recent studies by Gordon (1973) and Weatherholt (1983) indicated that more journalism classes were taught in Michigan and West Virginia, respectively.

Advisers' job satisfaction was the subject of some fairly

recent studies. Dvorak (1975) found a significant relationship between the principal's management style and the adviser's job satisfaction. Weaver (1984) found that advisers were plagued by "lack of training and burnout, the psychological inability to continue to be committed to advising" (p. 39). Similarly, Weatherholt (1983) found that many advisers in West Virginia would not continue advising if they had a choice.

As the foregoing paragraphs indicate, research has been conducted on various aspects of scholastic journalism. However, little research, if any, has been done about newspapers' involvement with scholastic publications organizations. Probably the closest that anyone has come to delving into that area has been to point out the value of entering contests for newspapers and their staff members.

Two sources indicated that contests can be helpful for improving the abilities and morale of staff members of high school newspapers. Shea (1981) said, ". . . students should be encouraged to enter their publication in state and national evaluation association services" (p. 114). Pasqua (1972) reported that judges in high school and junior college competition cited several ways in which having their work evaluated could help students. They included benefiting from feedback, providing motivation, setting standards, and serving as a teaching aid.

Methodology

Material to form the population for this study was provided by Edmund J. Sullivan, Director of Columbia Scholastic Press Association (CSPA), which is an administrative department of Columbia University in New York City.

CSPA is one of three national organizations--the others are National Scholastic Press Association and Quill and Scroll--providing, along with other services, an opportunity for scholastic publications' advisers and staffs to have their publications evaluated according to certain standards.

CSPA was chosen for this study because it had complete records of its high school newspaper memberships and ratings in recent years and because Sullivan was willing to share those records for the purposes of this study. Its membership (2,563 publications of all kinds in 1985-86) is the largest of the three organizations (E. J. Sullivan, personal communication, May 9, 1986).

Selection of a population that would provide meaningful data relevant to the study required several steps of elimination of CSPA members that did not meet necessary criteria.

First, the period 1981 through 1985 was selected. It included the most recent ratings available at the time this study was conducted, and it provided a long-enough span that some pattern might be shown by each newspaper's overall rating.

Second, all types of publications other than newspapers--such as yearbooks, literary magazines, newsmagazines, and school

pages in newspapers--were eliminated.

Third, newspapers published by any institution other than a high school--such as a college, elementary, or middle school--were eliminated. However, the study was not limited to newspapers at public schools. Those at private and parochial schools were included.

(It should be noted here that retention or elimination of a particular publication through the three preceding steps was based on classification of the school and its publication as listed in the CSPA records. That information, in turn, was supplied by each publication's adviser on the entry form accompanying the publication that he or she sent to CSPA for evaluation.)

Two more criteria were used for selection of the population. They were that the publication had to have been rated in the 1985 evaluation (the most recent one available), and that it had to have been entered in at least two of the other four years. Those conditions ensured an up-to-date evaluation and a likelihood that any quirk in a rating for a single year would not overly influence the newspaper's ranking.

When these steps were completed, they produced a population of 373 newspapers. A sample of 189 was drawn from that group with the use of a random number table. That sample size for the population of 373 gave the study a .95 confidence interval (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970).

While the population was being selected, work was being done

on the questionnaire. It was pretested by a group of advisers of high school newspapers not among those rated by CSPA. After some modification, the questionnaire was put in its final form and was ready for mailing when the sample was drawn.

The questionnaires, in booklet format, were mailed on March 26, 1986, to the advisers listed for the newspapers in CSPA's records. The name was followed by "or current adviser" and the name of the publication. Thus, if a newspaper had a new adviser, he or she should have received the questionnaire.

First-class mail was used for both outgoing and returning questionnaires. Postage stamps and the return address were provided on the booklets so that advisers had only to drop completed questionnaires in mailboxes. Each questionnaire had a unique code number that was used to determine who had responded for purposes of preparing a follow-up mailing.

Ninety-three responses (49.2 percent) had been received by April 14, 1986. On that date, a follow-up questionnaire was mailed to each of the 96 advisers who had not yet responded.

May 7, 1986, was used as a cutoff date for inclusion of responses in the final data set. As of that date, 137 questionnaires had been received. They constituted 72.5 percent of the sample of 189. Four of those responses could not be used. Subtracting those four from both the return total and the sample size produced an effective response rate of 71.9 percent based on an effective sample size of 185.

Ranking was used as the dependent variable in this study.

Thus, some explanation of procedures used in assigning ranking is necessary to an understanding the results of the study.

Newspapers submitted to CSPA are evaluated according to how well they meet criteria set forth in the organization's Newspaper Fundamentals scorebook. The maximum possible score for a publication is 1,000 points. According to the scorebook, "Placings in the contest are awarded on the basis of numerical scores as follows:

First Place 850-1000

Second Place 700-849

Third Place 500-699

Fourth Place below 500" (Paschal, 1981, p. 36).

Each newspaper in the sample had from three to five ratings, depending on how many times it had been entered in CSPA's contest/critique during the period studied. Because these ratings varied, in some cases, from year to year, it was necessary to devise a method of assigning each newspaper to a category indicative of its overall rating during the period. This procedure required two steps.

First, the ratings for each newspaper were averaged. The averaging process involved adding the ratings that the newspapers received during the period and dividing the sum by the number of times the newspaper had been entered during the period. For example, if a newspaper was entered four times and received ratings of 1, 2, 1, and 2, its average rating would have been

1.5.

Second, the newspapers had to be assigned to a manageable number of categories for use with the chi-square test. For this purpose, three categories were selected and designated good, better, and best. The category of best was used for the 76 newspapers that had averages of 1.0. Better newspapers included those 55 publications that had averages from 1.1 through 1.5. Fifty-eight newspapers, with averages higher than 1.5, went into the good category.

Demographics of Respondents' Schools

Examination of the completed questionnaires shows that they came from both public and private schools with a wide range of enrollments from a number of states. Public schools accounted for 108 of the 133 usable responses. Of the remaining 25 responses, 11 were from private schools affiliated with churches, while 14 were from private schools not affiliated with churches.

Enrollments of the responding advisers' schools were fairly evenly distributed. As might be expected, the fewest responses came from the extremes of the enrollment categories. Ten advisers said their schools had enrollments from one through 500, and eight said their school's enrollment was 2,501 or more. Categories between those extremes had more respondents. Thirty-two listed the enrollment as 501-1,000, while 30 indicated 1,001-1,500. Thirty-two marked 1,501-2,000, and 21 checked 2,001-2,500.

Responses came from a wide geographical area. Schools

represented were from 30 states and the District of Columbia. States with the most schools responding were New York, New Jersey, and Texas, with 12, 11, and 10 responses, respectively. At the other extreme, six states and the District of Columbia had only one response each (Table 1).

Membership in Publications Organizations

The questionnaire included a list of six organizations in which a high school newspaper might hold membership. It also had a generic listing (Your state's school publications organization) and a listing of other, with a blank for specification of any organization that might have been omitted from the list. Advisers were asked to mark all organizations to which their newspaper belonged (Table 2).

Since this hypothesis dealt with the number of organizations to which the publication belonged, the total number of choices marked by each adviser was the variable studied. That total ranged from one to five.

Responses indicated a fairly wide distribution of membership figures. Thirteen percent said that their newspapers belonged to only one organization, while the largest group (32 percent) said that they belonged to two organizations. Slightly more than one-fifth (23 percent) reported membership in three organizations, and almost that percentage (20 percent) indicated that they belonged to four organizations. Finally, almost as many (12 percent) belonged to five different organizations as belonged to

only one.

It appears that the number of organizations to which a newspaper belongs has little, if anything, to do with the enrollment of the school at which the newspaper is produced. A crosstabulation of memberships by enrollment categories (Table 3) shows that memberships are fairly widely distributed across enrollment categories.

Analysis and Results

Crosstabulation of newspapers' memberships in scholastic publications organizations by ranking showed an unmistakable pattern. As membership in scholastic publications organizations increased, so did the percentage of newspapers in the highest ranking category (Table 4).

Only 12 percent of the newspapers with membership in a single organization were rated in the highest category. When those papers belonging to two organizations were considered, 29 percent were rated best.

More than half (58 percent) of the newspapers belonging to three organizations had the highest rating, and 63 percent of those belonging to four organizations were rated best. Finally, the highest percentage (81) of best newspapers came in the group with the highest number of memberships (five) in scholastic press organizations.

Such a pattern would seem to indicate a significant difference. The chi-square test was used to determine whether

that indication was accurate.

The test showed a significant ($p < .05$) difference among rankings of newspapers according to the number of scholastic publications organizations of which the newspaper is a member. It should be noted here that the number of cells with frequencies less than five means that chi-square may not be a valid test. However, the probability level is so low that it cannot easily be ignored, even in light of that warning.

Conclusion

It would be difficult to overlook the trend indicated in the crosstabulation of membership in scholastic publications organizations by ranking. Where a difference occurs in one of the variables, a difference is likely to occur in the other.

One caution that must be expressed here is that a single study such as this one cannot conclusively demonstrate causation. In fact, at least two possible explanations might account for this situation. Both need to be considered.

One likely explanation is that newspapers' advisers and staffs benefit from such memberships. The critique of the publication that accompanies its rating provides feedback for those who work with the newspaper. The strong points are reinforced, and suggestions are made for improvement where the publication has weaknesses.

More memberships would produce more critiques. More critiques would provide more feedback. More feedback should help

the staff to produce a better newspaper. Besides such direct feedback, the organizations provide literature that helps students and advisers to learn more about producing good publications, and they have conventions or workshops that can help in the same way.

Another explanation might be that people with good newspapers want to belong to more organizations. The desire for recognition is a human characteristic. It seems only natural that an adviser and a staff with a good newspaper would want to send it to as many critique services as possible in order to achieve as much recognition as possible for the work that they did.

Whichever of the preceding explanations might account for the phenomenon, it seems clear that newspapers that belong to more scholastic publications organizations are likely to be better newspapers than those that belong to fewer such organizations. Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected.

Table 1

Number of Responses to
Questionnaires by States

State	Responses
New York	12
New Jersey	11
Texas	10
California	9
Florida	8
Massachusetts	8
Oregon	8
Illinois	7
Pennsylvania	6
Connecticut	6
Ohio	6
Maryland	5
Tennessee	4
Michigan	3
Missouri	3
Arizona	3
Oklahoma	3
Nebraska	2
Virginia	2
Colorado	2
Minnesota	2
Georgia	2
Washington	2
Nevada	2
New Hampshire	1
District of Columbia	1
Louisiana	1
Idaho	1
New Mexico	1
Hawaii	1
Iowa	1
Total	133

Table 2

Number of Respondents Reporting Membership in
Specific Scholastic Publications Organizations

Organization	Memberships
Columbia Scholastic Press Association	130
Quill & Scroll	76
Your state's school publications organization	73
National Scholastic Press Association	54
Southern Interscholastic Press Association	9
Northern Interscholastic Press Association	4
American Scholastic Press Association	10
Long Island School Press Association	5
New England Scholastic Press Association	5
Great Lakes Interscholastic Press Association	4
NOSPA	3
Journalism Education Association	3
Duquesne University School Press Association	2
Interscholastic League Press Conference	2
JAOS	2
FSPA	1
New York City Scholastic Press Association	1
Southern California Journalism Association	1
Suffolk University School of Journalism	1
S. W. Scholastic Press Association	1
Tennessee High School Press Association	1
New Jersey Scholastic Press Association	1
Long Island Catholic High School Journalism	1
Texas Association of Journalism Educators	1
Maryland Scholastic Press Association	1

Table 3

Crosstabulation of Enrollment by Number of
Scholastic Publications Organizations to
Which the Newspaper Belongs

Enrollment	Organizations					Row Total
	1	2	3	4	5	
1-500	0	6	2	1	1	10
501-1000	3	12	9	2	6	32
1001-1500	6	10	6	6	2	30
1501-2000	7	9	5	9	2	32
2001-2500	1	5	7	7	1	21
2501+	0	0	2	2	4	8
Col. Tot.	17	42	31	27	16	

Table 4

Crosstabulation of Newspaper's Memberships
in Scholastic Publications Organizations
by Ranking

Memberships!	Ranking			Row Total
	Best	Better	Good	
One	2	5	10	17
Two	12	12	18	42
Three	18	8	5	31
Four	17	9	1	27
Five	13	2	1	16
Col. Tot.	62	36	35	

N = 133

df = 8

chi-square = 35.743

p = .000

NOTE: Probability is not actually zero. This figure results from the computer's rounding the probability level to the nearest thousandth.

Table 5

Crosstabulation of School's Enrollment
by Newspaper's Ranking

Enrollment	Ranking			Row Total
	Best	Better	Good	
1-500	7	2	1	10
501-1000	13	9	10	32
1001-1500	15	7	8	30
1501-2000	12	7	13	32
2001-2500	10	8	3	21
2501+	5	3	0	8
Col. Tot.	62	36	35	

N = 133
df = 10
chi-square = 10.068
p = .5

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